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The Relationship between Dwarfism and Organizational Silence with the Moderating Role of Moral Sensitivity

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship between Dwarfism and organizational silence with the moderating role of moral sensitivity. This research is applied in terms of its purpose and its population consists of all employees in Hormozgan province. For this purpose, the issue was investigated by obtaining the opinions of 181 people from the target population through a simple random method in 1403. The findings of the study were tested by the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach and structural equations in Smart-PLS software. The findings showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between Dwarfism and organizational silence. This means that with an increase in Dwarfism, organizational silence also increases. On the other hand, a negative and significant relationship was observed between moral sensitivity and organizational silence. This means that with an increase in the level of moral sensitivity, organizational silence decreases. On the other hand, the moderating effect of moral sensitivity on the relationship between Dwarfism and organizational silence is also decreasing. That is, with the presence of the moral sensitivity variable, the relationship between Dwarfism and organizational silence is reduced.

Keywords: Dwarfism, Organizational silence, Moral sensitivity, Meritocracy.

1 | Introduction

Organizational silence is a social phenomenon in which employees refrain from expressing corrective suggestions or voicing concerns regarding existing problems within the organization [1]. Dwarfism nurturing refers to the process by which individuals are appointed to organizational positions for which they are not qualified and, in terms of necessary competencies, rank significantly below the appointing manager and even other employees. This often results in resistance to the advancement of talented employees with high potential [2]. Research suggests that placing individuals in inappropriate roles can demotivate competent employees and may increase organizational silence. Furthermore, moral sensitivity is a fundamental aspect of human

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ethics [3]. Individuals with high moral sensitivity are attuned to surrounding phenomena and evaluate them from an ethical perspective [4]. Moral sensitivity can foster corrective attitudes and, thereby, moderate the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Based on these discussions, the present study aims to examine the relationship between Dwarfism nurturing and organizational silence, with the moderating role of moral sensitivity, among employees in Hormozgan province.

The numerous consequences of failing to implement succession planning programs, low levels of meritocracy, and politically motivated behaviors arising from the appointment of inefficient and incompetent individuals to managerial positions—and their subsequent effects on organizational silence—can place organizations in a cycle of decline. This underscores the necessity of conducting research to conceptualize and clarify the phenomenon of Dwarfism nurturing and to identify its organizational repercussions. Organizations rely heavily on human resources to achieve effective performance; thus, proper human resource management is essential. This entails placing the right individuals in the right positions to attain organizational objectives [5]. Sociologists argue that meritocracy directs the most talented individuals to the most critical positions, thereby enhancing the survival and efficiency of society [6]. One of the major challenges faced by senior managers in contemporary organizations is selecting candidates for key positions who possess minimal weaknesses and maximal strengths [7]. Concurrently, the appointment of skilled and motivated personnel is a key factor in achieving organizational competitive advantage [8]. A lack of attention to managerial selection and succession planning can manifest negatively in the form of Dwarfism nurturing [9]. Furthermore, Morrison and Milliken [1] posit that organizational silence may result from managers' erroneous beliefs and attitudes. Consequently, effective managers can facilitate dynamic and constructive communication, thereby reducing organizational silence, whereas ineffective managers exacerbate it. In this context, moral sensitivity plays a moderating role by fostering ethical and corrective attitudes, thus mitigating the relationship between Dwarfism nurturing and organizational silence. Given the significance of organizational silence for improving organizational systems and the impact of Dwarfism nurturing on its development, the emergence of this trend can create substantial problems for organizations. Considering the lack of prior research in this area, it is imperative to investigate it empirically. Moreover, examining this issue in light of the moderating role of moral sensitivity clarifies the importance of cultivating ethical awareness to counteract the detrimental effects of Dwarfism nurturing and organizational silence, ultimately contributing to organizational excellence.

The inefficiency and unhealthiness of administrative systems within organizations constitute a significant social problem. The absence of meritocracy and merit-based selection—and, consequently, the phenomenon of "Dwarfism" in management—represents a key indicator of fundamental issues in organizational administrative health [1]. Management Dwarfism leads to the promotion and appointment of incompetent and unqualified individuals within the organizational hierarchy, positioning them in managerial roles to obstruct the career advancement of capable employees. This process is perpetuated by myopic managers, concerned about losing their own organizational positions, and extends hierarchically from the top echelons of the organization to all managerial layers [9]. An incapable manager, in order to occupy an executive position, appoints subordinate managers who are even less competent rather than nurturing successors or leveraging the skills of capable individuals, thereby suppressing employees with potential for managerial roles. Such managers, under pressure from higher authorities, attempt to diminish the stature of competent individuals—or at least force them to acquiesce—to make their own position appear stronger [9]. This process generates managerial crises, which, by marginalizing or underutilizing capable employees, fosters organizational silence among staff. However, the presence of professional ethics and ethical sensitivity among employees can contribute to altering this situation, mitigating the effects of management Dwarfism and organizational silence to some extent. Accordingly, the central research question can be formulated as follows: is there a significant relationship between management Dwarfism and organizational silence? Furthermore, is this relationship moderated by ethical sensitivity? Additionally, if these relationships are significant, what is their direction and magnitude?

Management Dwarfism refers to discriminatory and irrational behaviors toward individuals based on their diverse social, economic, or political backgrounds [10]. Broadly, it reflects informal, self-serving, and

sometimes covert actions by managers aimed at influencing others, consolidating power, or achieving predetermined objectives [11]. In practice, such managers demonstrate little concern for their subordinates or the organization, resulting in negative consequences for both employees and organizational performance [12]. Management Dwarfism generates issues such as the migration of competent and capable managers to other organizations or an increased inclination among employees to resign. When managerial positions are vacated without effective succession planning, irreparable harm may ensue, including delays in achieving organizational goals and missions, suboptimal service delivery to society, and the creation of conditions conducive to unethical practices within the organization [13]. Furthermore, management Dwarfism undermines employee morale and organizational effectiveness, ultimately fostering frustration and discouragement among high-potential employees [12]. This situation compromises the respect and recognition due to experts and may even create conditions for their psychological and physical harm. Dwarfism-oriented managers cultivate an organizational climate characterized by political maneuvering, jealousy, conflict, silence, destructive competition, indifference, ethical transgression, injustice, and lawlessness [14]. Such conditions can exacerbate organizational alienation, compelling employees to adopt a passive observer role and engage in organizational silence, as they perceive their opinions as disregarded and undervalued.

Managers exhibiting management Dwarfism, due to their reluctance to implement change and recognize the need for organizational reform, tend to foster organizational silence by withholding information and new ideas. In other words, their resistance to change leads them to withhold potentially valuable information, which in turn perpetuates organizational silence. Overall, management Dwarfism and organizational silence can significantly reduce organizational efficiency and innovation. Consequently, organizational leaders must strive to mitigate management Dwarfism and cultivate a culture that encourages positive feedback, values new ideas and suggestions, and promotes innovation throughout the organization.

Given that ethical sensitivity can also influence organizational silence [15], it is reasonable to expect that individuals with high ethical sensitivity will perceive their opinions as valuable to organizational leadership and actively work to address issues and challenges for the development and improvement of organizational goals. This, in turn, may mitigate organizational silence in the presence of management Dwarfism. Accordingly, the inclusion of ethical sensitivity as a moderating variable can reduce the strength of the negative relationship between management Dwarfism and organizational silence, fostering an environment conducive to the sharing of valuable information and perspectives within the organization. Moreover, by promoting the adoption of ethical values and cultivating a culture that emphasizes these principles, organizations can further reduce both management Dwarfism and organizational silence. In this framework, the relationship between management Dwarfism and organizational silence is conceptualized as positive, while the moderating role of ethical sensitivity is conceptualized as negative, aimed at attenuating the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Based on the theoretical foundations and the evidence presented, the research hypothesis is formulated as follows:

Research hypothesis: the relationship between management Dwarfism and organizational silence is negatively moderated by ethical sensitivity.

2 | Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive-survey in nature with respect to data collection. Primary data were gathered using a combination of library-based and field research methods. To test the research hypotheses, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed using Smart PLS software, version 3.2.1. For illustrating causal relationships, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework was utilized.

It is noteworthy that the questionnaire for measuring management Dwarfism was adapted from Tehrani et al. [9]. Initially, 35 items were identified using content analysis. Subsequently, a qualitative content analysis

approach was applied. Krippendorff [16] defines content analysis as a research technique employed to derive replicable and valid inferences from data regarding their textual context. He emphasizes that the goal of this method, like other research techniques, is to provide understanding, novel insights, a depiction of reality, and guidance for action. When the subject matter is derived from rich informational sources, content analysis allows methodological rigor and depth of insight to be systematically assessed more effectively than other research methods [17].

After conducting content analysis and identifying the constructs and their components, the content validity of the developed questionnaire was assessed using Lawshe's method [18]. Content validity ensures that the indicators are optimally designed to measure the intended constructs. To this end, experts were asked to evaluate each research item using a three-point scale: "essential," "useful but not essential," and "not necessary". They were also invited to suggest additional items if they deemed anything important was missing.

Eq. (1) presents the calculation of Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR).

$$CVR = \frac{n_e - \frac{N}{2}}{\frac{N}{2}}. \quad (1)$$

where:

N: total number of respondents

n_e: the number of respondents who rated the item as "essential"

Based on the number of respondents who evaluated the items, the minimum acceptable CVR value was determined according to *Table 1*. Items with a calculated CVR below the established threshold should be excluded from the instrument, as they do not meet the criteria for acceptable content validity.

Table 1. Minimum acceptable CVR values based on the number of experts [18].

CVR Value	Number of Experts	CVR Value	Number of Experts	CVR Value	Number of Experts
0.37	20	0.59	11	0.99	5
0.33	25	0.56	12	0.99	6
0.31	30	0.54	13	0.99	7
0.29	40	0.51	14	0.75	8
		0.49	15	0.78	9
		0.42	20	0.62	10

Since the study was conducted with input from 10 experts (4 associate professors of management, 3 associate professors of psychology, 2 associate professors of sociology, and 1 associate professor of accounting), the CVR values for the 25 items exceeded 0.62, resulting in the finalization of the questionnaire. In total, the following questionnaires were employed to measure the other variables of the study, with *Table 2* presenting the relevant details.

Table 2. Details of the questionnaires used in the study.

Source	Number of Items	Variable
Tehrani et al. [9]	25	Management Dwarfism
Vakola and Bouradas [19]	7	Organizational silence
Lützén et al. [20]	4	Ethical sensitivity

The aforementioned questionnaires employed a five-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neither agree nor disagree", "agree", to "strongly agree". The translation, localization, and deployment of the questionnaires were conducted following expert review and approval by university faculty and domain specialists, ensuring both face and content validity. Reliability of the research

questionnaires was further assessed using Cronbach's Alpha in SPSS, which indicated that all items exceeded the 0.70 threshold, confirming their reliability.

The study population comprised the employees of all administrative offices in Hormozgan province during the winter of 2024. Given the difficulty and near-impossibility of accessing the entire population, as well as the lack of official statistics, the population size was considered unknown. Accordingly, the sample size for an unknown population was calculated using *Eq. (2)*. The standard deviation (δ) for the five-point Likert scale data, as derived from *Eq. (2)*, was 0.667. The Z-value at a 95% confidence level was 1.96, and the estimation precision, appearing in the denominator of *Eq. (3)*, was 0.1 [21].

$$\delta = \frac{\max(x_i) - \min(x_i)}{6} = \frac{5-1}{6} = 0/667. \quad \textbf{(2)}$$

$$n = \frac{z^2_{\alpha/2}\delta^2}{\varepsilon^2} = \frac{(1/96)^2(0/667)^2}{(0/1)^2} = 170. \quad \textbf{(3)}$$

Data were collected through face-to-face administration of the questionnaires. Respondents were instructed to answer the items based on their personal experiences within the administrative environment and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. A total of 181 questionnaires were collected. It is noteworthy that 200 questionnaires were initially distributed, of which 181 were deemed usable.

3 | Research Findings

The analysis of the demographic data indicated that 108 respondents were male and 73 were female. Their mean age was 43.56 years, with a standard deviation of 10.86. Regarding educational attainment, 5 respondents held a doctoral degree, 41 held a master's degree, 71 held a bachelor's degree, 39 held an associate degree, and 25 held a high school diploma or lower.

Subsequently, each of the research hypotheses was analyzed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique. *Table 3* presents the findings of this analysis.

Table 3. Convergent validity and reliability of the research variables.

Composite Reliability	Extracted Variance	Cronbach's Alpha	Variable
0.959	0.648	0.758	Organizational silence
0.829	0.545	0.793	Management Dwarfism
0.846	0.614	0.764	Ethical sensitivity

Since the Cronbach's alpha values for all variables exceeded 0.70, the reliability of all constructs is confirmed. The average variance extracted (AVE) values were also above 0.50, indicating acceptable convergent validity. Composite reliability values were likewise within the desirable range, exceeding 0.70.

The relationships among the variables examined in each research hypothesis were tested using a causal framework with the PLS technique. *Figs. 1* and *2* present the corresponding findings.

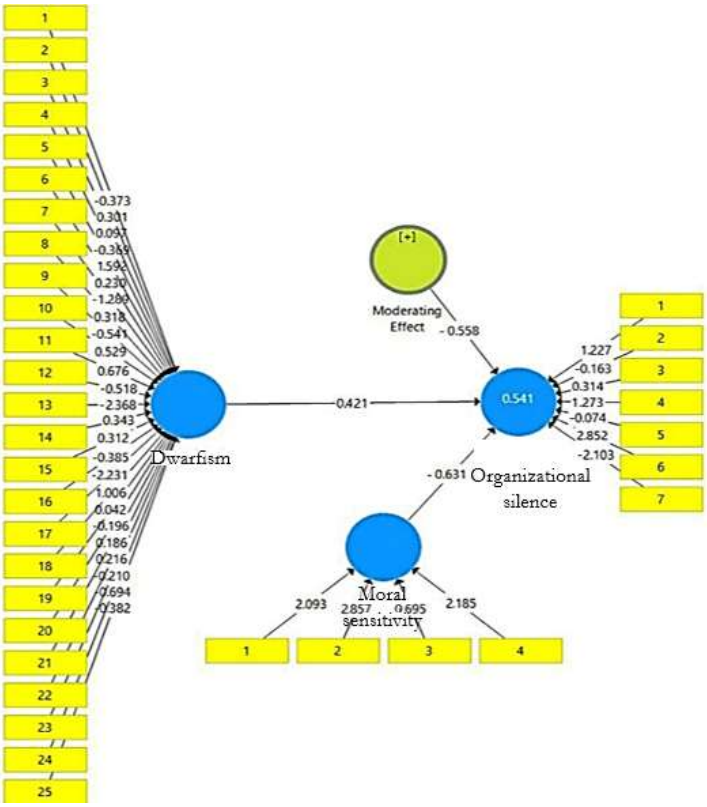

Fig. 1. PLS method for the overall research model.

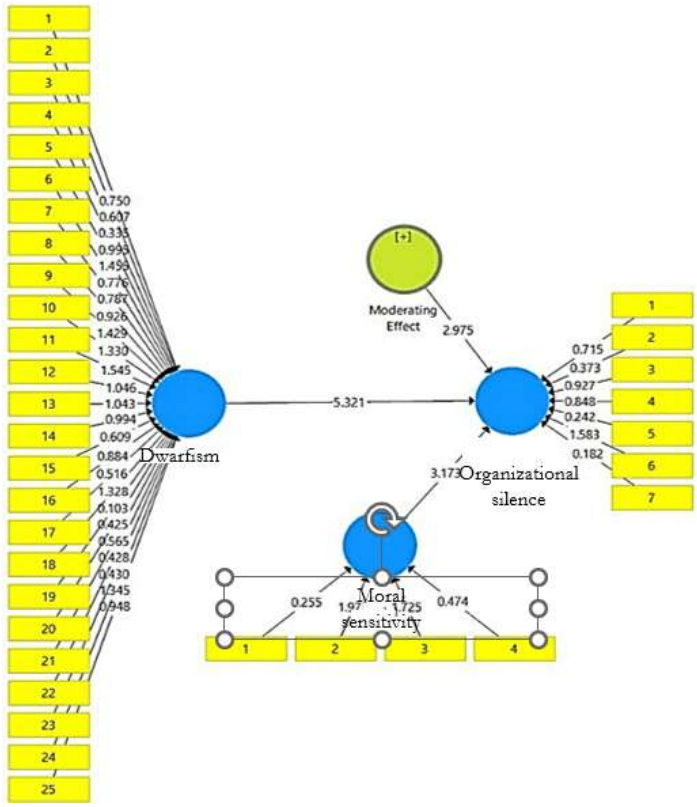

Fig. 2. t-value statistics of the overall research model using the bootstrap method.

Fig. 1 indicates that the R^2 value of the model in this section is 0.541. Based on *Fig. 2*, the research hypothesis cannot be rejected. The findings show a significant positive relationship between management Dwarfism and organizational silence, indicating that an increase in management Dwarfism is associated with an increase in organizational silence. Conversely, a significant negative relationship was observed between ethical sensitivity and organizational silence, meaning that higher levels of ethical sensitivity are associated with reduced organizational silence. Furthermore, the moderating effect of ethical sensitivity on the relationship between management Dwarfism and organizational silence is negative; that is, the presence of ethical sensitivity attenuates the strength of the relationship between management Dwarfism and organizational silence.

In PLS analysis, diagnostic validity, which reflects the presence of partial correlations between the indicators of one construct and the indicators of other constructs, is assessed using the [22] criterion. *Table 4* presents this matrix.

Table 4. Fornell and Larcker [22] matrix of the research variables.

Ethical Sensitivity	Management Dwarfism	Organizational Silence	Variables
		0.8049	Organizational silence
	0.7382	0.6028	Management Dwarfism
0.7835	0.6282	0.6377	Ethical sensitivity

As can be seen, the values on the main diagonal of the matrix are greater than all other values in their respective columns, indicating that the proposed model demonstrates adequate discriminant validity.

To assess the overall fit of the research model, which simultaneously evaluates both the measurement and structural components, the Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index is employed. Wetzels, Odekerken-Schroeder, and Wetzels et al. [23] propose threshold values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 to represent weak, moderate, and strong GoF, respectively. *Eq. (4)* illustrates the calculation method for this index.

$$\text{GoF} = \sqrt{\overline{\text{Communalities}} \times \overline{R^2}}. \quad (4)$$

where:

Communalities: the mean of the shared values of the first-order latent variables.

R^2: is the coefficient of determination of the model.

Table 5 presents the findings of this section.

Table 5. Calculation of GoF for the structural model.

Gof	Average shared values	R^2
0.6817	0.8591	0.5412

The obtained GoF values indicate a strong overall fit of the model.

4 | Conclusion

Organizational silence is a detrimental phenomenon that, when intersecting with management Dwarfism, can pose compounded risks to the organization. Conversely, the presence of ethical factors may attenuate the strength of this relationship. The present study aims to examine the relationship between management Dwarfism and organizational silence, with a focus on the moderating role of ethical sensitivity.

Failing to place individuals in positions suited to their abilities can lead to the demotivation of capable employees and may exacerbate both organizational silence and management Dwarfism. Organizations rely heavily on human resources for effective performance; therefore, appropriate human resource management

is critical, meaning that the right people must be positioned in the right roles to achieve organizational objectives. A competent manager can foster dynamic and constructive communication, thereby reducing organizational silence, whereas an ineffective manager is likely to intensify it. In this context, ethical sensitivity, by promoting ethical attitudes and corrective orientation, can moderate the relationship between management Dwarfism and organizational silence.

An incompetent manager seeking to secure an executive position may, at lower managerial levels, appoint less capable managers instead of developing successors and utilizing talented individuals, thereby suppressing employees with potential managerial capabilities. These managers may exert top-down pressure to diminish the influence of capable employees or, at minimum, constrain their contributions to appear more prominent themselves. This process can trigger managerial crises, and by underutilizing or marginalizing competent individuals, organizational silence among employees is reinforced. Nevertheless, the presence of professional ethics and ethical sensitivity among employees can help mitigate these effects, moderating the impact of management Dwarfism and organizational silence and contributing to a positive change in organizational dynamics.

The findings indicated a significant positive relationship between management Dwarfism and organizational silence, suggesting that an increase in management Dwarfism is associated with a corresponding increase in organizational silence. Conversely, a significant negative relationship was observed between ethical sensitivity and organizational silence, indicating that higher levels of ethical sensitivity are associated with reduced organizational silence. Furthermore, the moderating effect of ethical sensitivity on the relationship between management Dwarfism and organizational silence was found to be negative; that is, the presence of ethical sensitivity attenuates the strength of this relationship.

It is recommended that managers and strategic planners carefully consider these variables in their organizational planning to mitigate organizational decline. Additionally, by promoting higher levels of organizational ethics, they can prevent the emergence of negative behaviors and outcomes within the organization.

This study faced certain limitations that should be taken into account when generalizing the findings. For instance, limitations related to the study population and the lack of familiarity of some respondents with the subject matter are among such constraints.

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